



Editorial

People to suffer greater afflictions

Gloria Arroyo's three-year term saw a worsened economic and social crisis and the infliction of greater hardships and oppression on the people. Arroyo's plans laid out in her State of the Nation Address (SONA) on July 26, which are all in accordance with the wishes of the International Monetary Fund (IMF), will exacerbate the situation in the next six years or more.

Following IMF dictates, Arroyo will strain to wipe out the budget deficit, balance the government budget and pay off the public and national debt to enable

the country to borrow more from international banks.

Ten tax-related measures formed the centerpiece of Arroyo's speech, all of them intended to enable government to collect more than a hundred billion pesos needed to offset the Philippines' extremely large deficit and debt burden.

But the "solutions" proffered by the regime redound to added burdens. Among them are additional taxes on the gargantuan profits of oil and telecommunications companies as well as an increase in excise taxes on all goods and services. At first glance, a number of these taxes such as the franchise tax for servicing cellphones, additional tariffs on the importation of petroleum products, and the tax on the gross earnings of companies would be shouldered by corporate giants. In fact, it is ordinary folk who will end up footing any additional tax by having to pay higher prices for petroleum products, cellphone use and various goods and services.

Another extremely onerous "solution" that is supposed to alleviate the budget deficit is streamlining the bureaucracy with its attendant layoff of hundreds of thousands of government employees via early retirement. Government employees are the prime targets of government cost reduction because their salaries run to ₱286.5 billion annually and comprise 33.1% of the overall government budget.

The regime plans to lay off 30,000 government employees immediately with the abolition of 80 government agencies.



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Thirty other agencies are also set to be abolished. Malacañang has announced plans to lay off 100,000 employees next year due to "redundancy". However, COURAGE, a militant organization of government employees says that the Arroyo regime actually plans to fire up to 420,000 or 38% of its rank-and-file.

In an effort to stave off the government employees' intense anger and opposition, the regime has promised to help them set up their own businesses in view of the loss of their jobs—a ridiculous and extremely incredible proposition.

The massive layoff of government employees is inutile in reducing the budget deficit as it would not eliminate rampant and severe bureaucratic corruption and erroneous priorities which are the biggest causes behind the squandering of government resources. Not only would it worsen unemployment, it would likewise reduce the already inadequate number of public agencies providing basic services. Tens of thousands more are set to be booted out of work with the privatization of government-owned corporations.

One of the state companies to be privatized is the National Power Corporation (NAPOCOR). In her SONA, Arroyo chose to underscore the need for sufficient, efficient and inexpensive electricity supply, a need that would supposedly be satisfied through privatization. This dovetails the IMF line that it is the private sector that should be tasked with supplying and setting the price of electricity to free electrical services from government anomalies, inutility and corruption.

The country's experience with privatization is unequivocal, however. Contrary to the promised reduction of electricity costs, relegating services to the avarice of private business has caused already dizzying costs of electricity and other services to shoot up. There is no basis for contemplating that things will be any different with NAPOCOR's privatization. NAPOCOR will definitely raise the cost of the electricity it supplies to power distributors, and distributors will surely recoup higher costs by charging consumers more.

Arroyo repeated her promise to generate new jobs, clarifying however that it is "the prospering sec-

tors of industry, services and small businesses" that will raise employment opportunities in the cities and the agribusiness sector that would be responsible for generating employment in the countryside and stemming the flow of peasants into urban areas.

But even as she spoke of this, the manufacturing sector continued on its inexorable decline. Arroyo was silent on how to go about developing industry, the real job creating agent for workers. Rather, her regime merely intends to perpetuate imperialist "globalization" and other neocolonial policies that prevent any development of national industrialization. Unemployment will continue to worsen as long as the country has no genuine industries.

Joblessness will likewise continue to worsen as long as the centuries-old land problem is not resolved. Arroyo said nothing about agrarian reform save for pushing her plan to use farmlands as collateral for bank loans, including lands already distributed under the government's sham land reform program. It is a proposition that would further deprive peasants of their farms.

What all this brings to the fore even more is the hollowness and failure of the government's much-vaunted land reform program. With bankruptcy widespread among the peasantry, many of them will definitely be unable to pay their debts and would end up having their lands foreclosed. Other private banks would then be carrying out the role that the Land Bank of the Philippines has long played in seizing peasants' farmlands and selling them to anyone who could afford to pay the price set by the banks. It is a systematic and legal means of confiscating peasants' lands and reconcentrating them in the hands of landlords, hacienda owners and



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big agribusiness corporations.

Arroyo also plans to commence "cha-cha" (charter change) by 2005. This is a sordid scheme to obliterate from the charter any remaining formal obstacle to the imperialist violation of national sovereignty and intervention in the Philippines' internal affairs. It would likewise eliminate any hindrance to the further control and abuse of the economy by imperialists and their lackeys. The people's movements will be further restricted, their resistance suppressed, and their civil liberties trampled in the name of the US' "anti-terrorist war".

"Cha-cha" likewise involves

shifting the system of government from a presidential to a parliamentary one, something that Arroyo and her supporters in congress have long been eagerly anticipating. They have obviously been enthusiastically pushing for "cha-cha" for their own personal gain, mainly since it would be a means of extending their terms.

In the face of all this, Arroyo's SONA was conspicuously silent on many other extremely major issues. Arroyo had no response to the demand for a ₱155 increase in the daily wage that would enable workers to receive the minimum income needed for their families to live decently. She was also silent on the

₱3,000 salary increase demanded by government employees and on the demand to reduce the prices of goods and services, as well as other demands to provide the people with even a modicum of immediate relief.

There is no mistaking what is in store for the next six or more years under the Arroyo regime—more suffering and sacrifice for the people, especially the toiling masses who have long been suffering and sacrificing.

"The people first!" was Arroyo's key slogan in her SONA. But the reality behind her much-vaunted plans reveal the exact opposite.

AB

Corruption, wastefulness and wrong priorities are the real reasons behind the gargantuan deficit in the government's national budget

► Up to ₱100-200 billion is squandered annually because of corruption. A United Nations Development Program study shows that 70% of the amount wasted is due to public works anomalies and 30% to anomalies in the purchase of supplies and equipment.

► Over 67% (or ₱600 billion) of the proposed 2005 budget will be eaten up in servicing the Philippines' external debt.

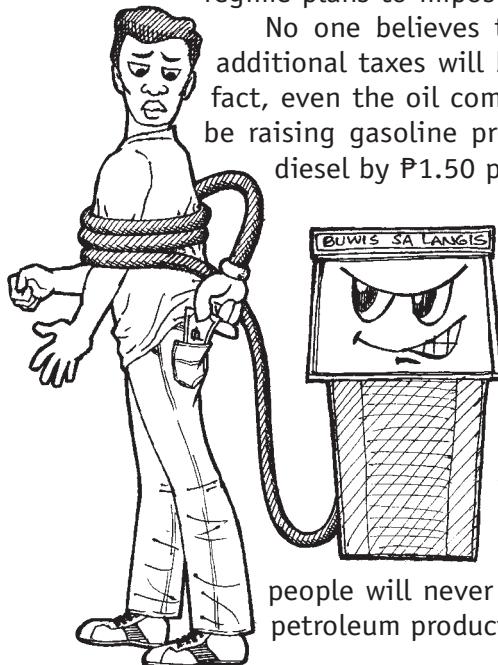
► Over ₱90 billion or about 10% of the proposed budget for 2005 will go to the Department of National Defense, the AFP, PNP and Malacañang's intelligence fund. The amount will be used to suppress the people and violate their human rights. Add to this the amount that will be squandered on the luxuries enjoyed, the kickbacks collected and the other anomalies perpetrated by high-ranking officers in the military and police AB

Additional oil taxes to burden the people

Despite incessant oil price hikes, the Arroyo regime plans to raise tariffs on the importation of petroleum products from 3% to 5-7%. Oil prices are sure to rise anew as a result, but what's worse is that a ₱2.00 excise tax will be directly charged to consumers for every liter of all petroleum products except LPG (liquefied petroleum gas). Malacañang expects to earn ₱34.3 billion annually from these taxes, which are the most onerous among the additional taxes that the regime plans to impose on the people.

No one believes the regime when it says that the additional taxes will be borne by the oil companies. In fact, even the oil companies have warned that they will be raising gasoline prices by up to ₱1.20 per liter and diesel by ₱1.50 per liter. They also plan to raise the price of LPG by 50 centavos to ₱1 per kilo.

Malacañang is fully aware of the great possibility that the imposition of these additional taxes will fuel the people's widespread anger. The regime thus shrewdly plans to time the imposition of additional taxes whenever crude oil prices dip in the world market. This way, however, the people will never have any relief. Whether prices of petroleum products go up or down in the world mar-



ket, there will be oil price hikes in the Philippines.

The average 50 centavo price increase by oil companies every time crude oil prices rise in the international market is already most onerous for the people. The additional oil taxes that come on top of this will be an even greater

burden.

In the face of this, progressives in congress have correctly called for the nationalization of the oil industry and the junking of the oil deregulation law. Oil prices have already increased more than 60 times in the oil industry deregulation law's eight years of existence.

The latest increase in the prices of principal petroleum products took place on August 3, when gasoline, diesel and cooking gas prices went up by 50 centavos. It was the seventh time gasoline prices were raised and the sixth time diesel prices were hiked since January 2004. AB

10 tax measures by the Arroyo regime

In a desperate bid to earn an additional ₱126.66 billion to offset the enormous budget deficit, defray huge expenses and pay for the gigantic government debt, the Arroyo regime plans to implement various additional tax measures that are sure to exacerbate the plight of the Filipino people who are already in very dire straits. Among them are

1) Increasing the VAT (value-added tax) from 10% to 12% in 2006 and 14% in 2007. Expected revenues: ₱19.9 billion.

2) Imposing a 3% franchise tax on telecommunications companies, which will in turn pass this on to cellphone users. Expected revenues: ₱6 billion.

3) Shifting from net to gross income taxation of corporations and self-employed individuals. It is a way for corporations to profit immensely without worrying about any tax on their profits after having settled their gross income tax. Meanwhile, the gross income tax which is practically a sales tax can more easily be passed on to consumers by simply raising the prices of goods produced or services provided by corporations. Expected revenues: ₱16.76 billion.

4) Rationalizing fiscal incentives such as tax discounts or exemptions and subsidies, among others, to further comply with World Trade Organization regulations. Expected revenues: ₱5 billion.

5) Imposing an index reclassification tax on "vices," such as liquor and cigarettes, which are consumed by many people. Expected revenues: ₱14 billion.

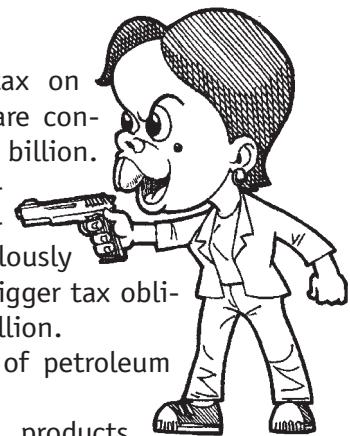
6) Granting a general tax amnesty. By paying a considerably smaller amount, big corporations and wealthy individuals who have anomalously evaded taxes will be exempted from fulfilling bigger tax obligations in the past. Expected revenues: ₱25 billion.

7) Increasing tariffs on the importation of petroleum products. Expected revenues: ₱4.6 billion.

8) Hiking excise taxes on petroleum products. Expected revenues: ₱29.7 billion.

9) Raising fees charged by various government agencies. Expected revenues: ₱5.7 billion.

10) Enhancing the tax revenue potential of government-owned and -controlled corporations such as the Public Estates Authority and the Philippine Gaming and Amusement Corporation. AB



Alliance against tax hikes formed in congress

A group of lawmakers formed the Alliance of Legislators Against Regressive Taxes (ALERT) on August 2 to resist the Arroyo regime's plans to impose additional taxes on the people in the face of widespread poverty and unemployment.

ALERT, led by Bayan Muna and Anakpawis representatives in congress, consists as of now of 39 lawmakers who have signed House Resolution No. 91 calling on the government to first solve the problem of tax collection before imposing additional taxes.

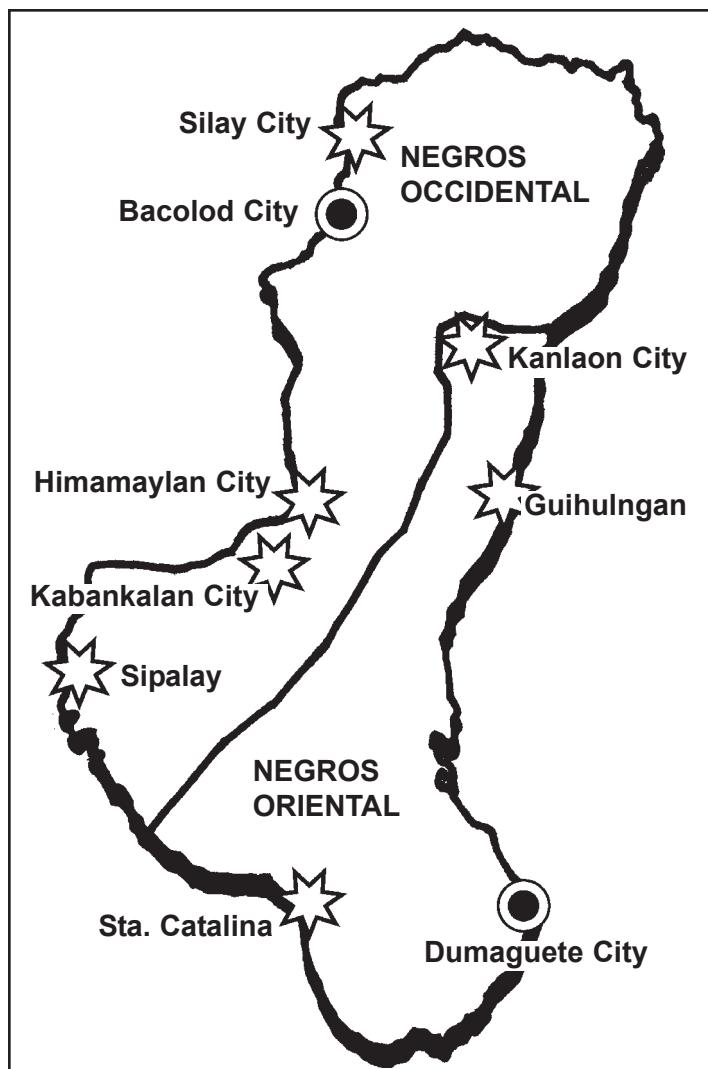
The resolution filed by Teodoro Casiño of Bayan Muna asserts that up to ₱285 billion is lost every year due to various taxation-related problems. ALERT pointed out that the principal factors in the government's massive shortfall in tax collection are large-scale tax evasion by big businessmen, the huge reduction in tariff collections due to trade liberalization and the excessive incentives granted to favored industries. ALERT also said that the gargantuan budget deficit results from the fact that debt service gobbles up to 75% of the government's tax revenue and other income.

More legislators from congress and the senate are expected to join ALERT in the face of the people's intense opposition to plans to impose new tax burdens. AB

Armed struggle resurges in Negros

Brig. Gen. Jeffrey Sodusta of the 303rd Infantry Brigade took great pains to boast that the AFP was already zeroing in on the NPA, especially after a Philippine Army raid on a Red fighters' encampment in Guihulngan, Negros Oriental on June 12. Eight soldiers were killed and seven enemy troopers were wounded in the firefight but the AFP concealed the real extent of its casualties. Even as the AFP was shooting off its mouth, however, it was embarrassed no end when this time, the NPA ambushed a platoon of the 12th IB and CAFGU in Sitio Cagay, Barangay Camindangan in Sipalay City, Negros Occidental on July 22.

The AFP was so obviously frantic that it immediately called for an Emergency Joint Police-Army Conference in Camp Alfredo Montelibano in Negros Occidental and came up with a "coordinated strategy" for an "all-out defense" against the NPA which may attack anytime and anywhere in Negros.



Accordingly, the AFP is currently concentrating more forces in Negros. Almost 500 Scout Rangers were drawn from various units nationwide and brought to the island on June 26 to serve as strike forces against the NPA. This is aside from the 11th IB, 61st IB, 66th IB and 12th IB (which serves as "handler" to 1,200 CAFGU elements), 542nd Engineering Battalion, PNP Regional Mobile Groups (RMG 6 and RMG 7) and Arturo Tabara's RPA bandit group that have long been sowing terror in Negros.

The revolutionary forces, however, will surely surmount the concentration of additional military forces and the supposedly new anti-NPA strategies just as it had done during previous enemy military campaigns, and advance armed struggle in the island.

Blow to "Oplan Gordian Knot." When the Arroyo regime unleashed in 2002 its so-called "Oplan Gordian Knot" which it dubbed as a quick and bold solution to the revolutionary movement's growth in the island, the NPA responded with a series of tactical offensives. On August 6, 2003, 1Lt. Regner Jerson, one of Sodusta's most active officers, was ambushed and killed in Kanlaon City, Negros Oriental. The AFP launched a brigade-size operation to recover its flagging morale, but military forces merely ended up "punching the air."

The enemy's demoralization worsened when it sustained more casualties on August 17. A composite force of Scout Rangers, Philippine Army soldiers and RPA elements attempted to assault an NPA encampment in Sitio Mambutoy, Barangay Locoton in Kabankalan City, Negros Occidental, but it was the AFP that brought back two dead and two wounded. There were no casualties on the NPA side.

Simultaneously, the democratic mass movement in the cities and town centers strongly assailed intensifying militarization in the countryside.

On December 16, 2003, the NPA assaulted an RPA camp in Sitio Kakha, Barangay Tamlac, Sta. Catalina, Negros Oriental. Red fighters from the Southwest Front seized eleven M16 rifles, an M79 grenade launcher and ammunition. Many people rejoiced upon hearing news about the raid. They had long been complaining about the RPA's extortion, illegal drug pushing, animal rustling and threats to their lives.

In response, tighter coordination was effected among local governments, the military and the police through Peace and Order Councils at the municipal and provincial levels. The AFP, PNP and other government agencies' intelligence machinery was strength-

ened through the Barrio Intelligence Network (BIN). Detachments were reinforced and military and psy-war operations conducted more frequently. Anti-communist and malicious intrigues against progressive organizations continued without letup. But the revolutionary movement and the people of Negros firmly resisted all this.

Intensifying armed struggle. At dawn of February 15, 2004, guerrillas of the Bonifacio Pasakan Command-Guerrilla Front 2 attacked and overran the 44th CAFGU Coy detachment in Barangay Mahalang, Himamaylan City. It was the first raid ever on the 61st IB's heavily fortified Advance Command Post. A Philippine Army sergeant who served as the detachment's commander was killed while two CAFGU elements surrendered. The NPA confiscated an M16, an M14 and three Garand rifles. Eduardo Raya, a CAFGU element, was arrested for his active role in anti-NPA operations, but was eventually released on humanitarian grounds.

The raid also rendered justice to victims of fascist brutality like 62-year-old Morito Arcadenia who died after being repeatedly struck with a rifle butt and a piece of wood by elements of the 61st IB conducting operations in November 2002 in Manlocahoc, Sipalay, Negros Occidental.

On March 3, Red fighters of the Leonardo Panaligan Command (LPC)-Guerrilla Front 1 ambushed and killed two RPA elements who were aboard a motorcycle in Sitio Estaka, Barangay Humay-Humay, Guihulngan, Negros Oriental.

Meanwhile, on May 5, at the height of the election campaign, a commando unit under the LPC attacked the PNP Provincial Mobile Group (PMG) Outpost in Barangay Masulog, Kanlaon City. The PMG was a key unit in launching counterrevolutionary campaigns against the NPA. It was also a bane to the masses because policemen extorted money from all vehicles that passed in front of the outpost. The Red fighters seized three M16s, an M14 rifle, three cal .45 pistols, ammunition, boots and uniforms from the five-minute raid.

In Barangay Guimbalao, Silay City, members of the Jean Pelle Command arrested on May 8 two RPA elements extorting money from 20 haciendas. Confiscated from them were the collection money, two .38 revolvers and a grenade. The RPA elements also admitted to serving as private bodyguards of politicians. They were released after they promised to leave the RPA and turn a new leaf.

Whatever the blows inflicted by the enemy, they will surely meet defeat as armed struggle and the entire revolutionary movement continue to advance to higher levels in Negros.

AFP attack on NPA camp stymied

On the twelfth of June, an NPA unit successfully defended itself and safely retreated after the 11th IB penetrated and attempted to destroy a guerrilla encampment in Tacpao, Guihulngan, Negros Oriental. Not only did the AFP return home frustrated, it sustained eight dead and seven wounded after the tables were turned and Red fighters lying in ambush rained bullets on them. A Red fighter was martyred in the firefight.

According to the Leonardo Panaligan Command (LPC), as early as June 10, one of its encamped units had already monitored the movements of a reconnaissance platoon of the 11th IB and had already analyzed the objective of the enemy operation. The enemy platoon's mission was to engage any force it may encounter in the NPA camp. Its mode of operation consisted of night movements. But NPA sentries in their concealed guard posts and everyone else in the camp were already on alert.

At around 4:45 at dawn on June 12, it was the NPA that first rained bullets on enemy forces who were maneuvering to penetrate the camp perimeter. Sentry 1 opened fire as the enemy conducted flanking maneuvers from the left and right. Three soldiers from the 11th IB died on the spot and several others were wounded. Sentry 2 then came to reinforce Sentry 1. The enemy was so taken by surprise and relegated to a defensive position that it immediately retreated. Nevertheless, the NPA was unable to sustain the initiative to wipe out the enemy altogether. Information was not immediately relayed to the NPA command that would have enabled the latter to gauge the overall battle situation and order the pursuit and annihilation of the retreating enemy.

By around 8 a.m., all of the NPA forces had already retreated. Three hours passed before enemy reinforcements arrived.

The military brought four helicopters to evacuate its dead and wounded in an attempt to conceal its defeat. Retreating troops of the 11th IB then simply spread the "news" to every barrio they passed through that they had allegedly killed a large number on the NPA side.

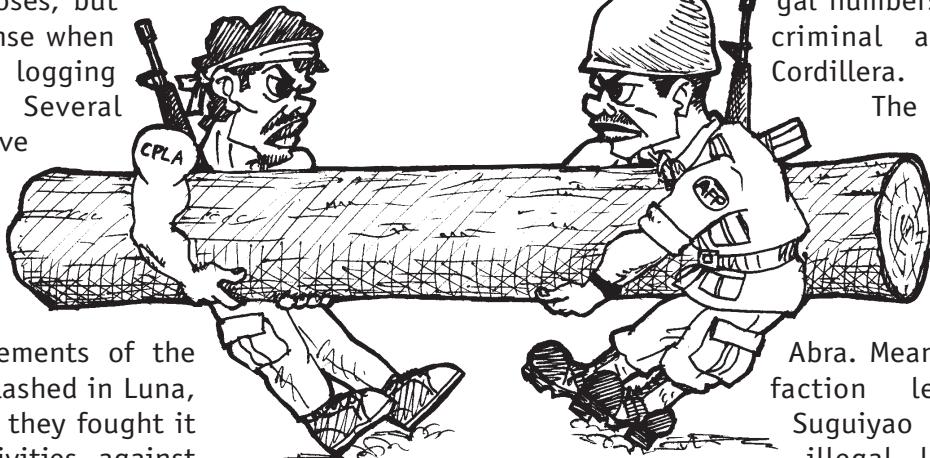
CPLA and AFP: Rivals in illegal logging in Apayao

On the whole, the reactionary military and the counterrevolutionary group that calls itself the Cordillera People's Liberation Army (CPLA) collude in criminal and counterrevolutionary activities and purposes, but their rivalry is intense when it comes to illegal logging in the Cordillera. Several bloody clashes have already erupted between the two groups as they protect their respective interests.

On July 10, elements of the AFP and the CPLA clashed in Luna, Apayao. The reason they fought it out: extortion activities against Furniture Group Inc (FGI). The FGI refused to shell out the P10 million that the CPLA demanded from it, so CPLA elements burned down a truck and a number of bulldozers owned by the company. The 17th IB which provides protection to the FGI, shot it out with them. Eight CPLA elements were wounded and two civilians were killed in the firefight. After defeating the CPLA, the AFP smuggled 70 truck-

loads of timber, which it could do even in broad daylight.

To cover up their involvement in the incident, the 5th ID spread around the lie that it was the NPA they had a firefight with. Comrade



Martin Montaña, spokesperson of the NPA Chadli Molintas Command in the Ilocos-Cordillera Region has strongly refuted this claim.

Both the CPLA and the AFP pose as NPA not only to cover up their criminal activities but to malign the NPA in the eyes of the people.

Claims by the CPLA that it protects the ancestral lands and

forests of Apayao are also a lie, said Ka Martin. Reports of NPA units and the organized masses show that CPLA factions are involved in illegal logging, marijuana cultivation, jueteng (an illegal numbers game) and other criminal activities in the Cordillera.

The Mailed Molina faction continues to rake in money from illegal logging in Bucloc and other nearby towns in southern Abra. Meanwhile, the Balweg faction led by Michael Suguiyao Jr. connives with illegal loggers in Luna, Pudtol, Conner and Sta. Marcela in Apayao.

Extensive areas of forest lands and other terrain have been devastated due to decades of indiscriminate logging by the AFP, CPLA and rapacious companies, warlords and illegal logging syndicates. The obtaining crisis and depleted national resources are pushing these groups to intense rivalry and bloody clashes. **AB**

NPA seizes 12 firearms in Agusan and Zamboanga clashes

The New People's Army (NPA) confiscated 12 firearms in two separate clashes in Agusan del Sur and Zamboanga del Sur on August 5.

In Agusan del Sur, the NPA seized eight firearms, killed at least eight soldiers and wounded 13 troops in an encounter with assaulting elements of the 1st and 2nd Reconnaissance Coy of the 4th ID in Sitio Manawang, Barangay Guinabsan, Buenavista. In a statement, NDF-Northcentral Mindanao spokesperson Cesar Renerio belied enemy reports fed to the media that only five soldiers were killed and that many NPA fighters were killed and wounded. One guerrilla was martyred in the hour-long fighting, said Renerio.

In Zamboanga del Sur, the NPA raided a Philippine National Police detachment in Barangay Boyugan West, Kumalarang. The policemen in the detachment succumbed to a ruse because the Red fighters who entered the outpost wore military uniforms and sported military regulation haircuts. The NPA seized two M16 rifles and two 9 mm pistols from the police.

"Balance Piston" denounced

ANAKPAWIS party-list representative Rafael Mariano denounced "Balance Piston" and any presence of US troops in the Philippines as a "concrete violation of the country's national sovereignty." "Balance Piston," a joint RP-US war exercise participated in by 200 troops (50 Americans and 150 Filipinos) is currently being launched in Carmen, North Cotabato. It began in the last week of July and will end in the last week of August.

Mariano said the Philippines has been transformed into a virtual US military base that services US wars of aggression and serves as a showcase of American politico-military might in the Asia-Pacific region.

In a related news development, the Bagong Alyansang Makabayan (BAYAN), Moro-Christian People's Alliance (MCPA), United Youth of the Philippines (UYP) and the Federation of Overseas Filipino Workers (OFW) in Maguindanao and Cotabato City launched protest actions in Cotabato on July 28 against "Balance Piston." They asserted their right to protest despite intense harassment from the military and police.

The demonstrators asserted that exercises like "Balance Piston" would result in indiscriminate arrests of Moros and put their lives in danger. The rallyists cited the death of Arzeed Baharon, a 19-year-old resident of Barangay San Roque, Zamboanga City hit by gunfire from American troops who, with elements of the Philippine Marines were conducting live firing exercises in the city.

IHRA demands pullout of RSOT in Ilocos Sur

THE Ilocos Human Rights Alliance (IHRA) renewed in the last week of July its demand for the pullout of the AFP's Reengineered Special Operations Team (RSOT) from Cabugao, Sinait and Sta. Lucia towns in Ilocos Sur due to abuses committed against the people in these areas. IHRA's secretary general, Pastor Jerry Arzadon also denounced Col. Roberto Almadin, commander of the 50th IB that oversees the RSOT in question, for his failure to act on complaints lodged with him since April 12.

Five of the victims faced the mass media and recounted the abuses they experienced in the hands of the military.

Alex Tan and Rolly Marato, both peasants from Sta. Lucia, assailed the RSOT's listing them as NPA members after Red fighters attacked the Sta. Lucia municipal hall on September 15, 2003. Soldiers, meanwhile, illegally ransacked the homes of Luzviminda Igne and Gloria Ibay, both of Baracbac, Sinait, because of their alleged connections to the NPA. Roland Ibarra of Quibit-Quibit, Sinait also complained of close surveillance by the military who suspected him of being an NPA member.

CPP condemns journalists' murder

THE Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) strongly condemned the death of two journalists who were murdered in succession in the first week of August.

In a statement, CPP spokesperson Gregorio "Ka Roger" Rosal said that the murders bring to the fore the grave dangers that journalists face, especially those who expose the corruption and terrorism of reactionary politicians, warlords and military officials.

The National Union of Journalists in the Philippines (NUJP)-Iloilo Chapter also denounced the journalists' murder. In a gathering in Iloilo City on August 6, NUJP-Iloilo members wore black T-shirts and armbands and lit candles in front of the provincial capitol to protest violence against journalists and condole with the victims' families.

The latest case was the slaying in Bauan, Batangas on August 5 of Arnel Manalo, a correspondent of dzRH in Batangas and the newspaper *Bulgar*. Prior to this, Roger Mariano, a broadcaster of dzJC-Aksyon Radyo in Ilocos Norte was also murdered on August 1.

Meanwhile, in Cebu City, three broadcasters of El Nuevo-Bantay Radyo narrowly escaped death when the jeep they were riding was ambushed on the night of August 5.

Zamboanga residents oppose mining

RESIDENTS of Midsalip, Zamboanga del Sur opposed plans to conduct mining operations in their town, fearing that it would suffer the same fate as other areas in the Zamboanga Peninsula now saddled with pollution and the dislocation of the local population.

According to the Tumaud Pusaka Subaanen dig Midsalip (Tupusumi), an organization of Subanen tribespeople in Midsalip and the multisectoral Katawhan sa Midsalip Supak sa Mina (Kamisumi),

widespread mercury poisoning occurred in the town of Sibutad, Zamboanga del Norte and thousands of Subanen families were forced to evacuate from Barangay Cabanatuan, Siocon in the same province due to the operations of Philex Mining Corporation, an Australian company.

Geotechnics and Mines Inc. (GMI) has a pending application to mine gold, silver and chromite in five barangays of Midsalip which the DENR had already

declared as watershed areas. The villages are sources of drinking water, irrigation and fish, and provide protection against flooding. According to Midsalip residents, mining these areas will ruin the lives and livelihood of the people not only in Zamboanga del Norte but also in Zamboanga del Sur and Zamboanga Sibuguey.

Tupusumi and Kamisumi led a protest rally on July 14 against GMI's planned mining operations.

Congressman Joel Virador's home raided

SUSPECTED elements of the Military Intelligence Group (MIG) ransacked the house of Congressman Joel Virador in Barangay Matina, Davao City at 9 a.m. on July 14 without a search warrant. The raiding team seized various documents, personal belongings and money. Virador, who was in Manila at the time of the incident, is a former official of the Bagong Alyansang Makabayan (BAYAN) in Southern Mindanao and one of the representatives of Bayan Muna in congress. The adjacent office of BAYAN-Southern Mindanao was raided simultaneously.

Virador strongly denounced the illegal raid on his house. He said, "If they can do this to me, then what prevents them from doing it to ordinary civilians?" Bayan Muna plans to file a resolution in congress to investigate the incident.

Gracia Burnham did not clear AFP

CONTRARY to claims by the Department of Justice (DOJ), Gracia Burnham never retracted in court what she said in 2003 regarding the collusion and division of ransom money between the AFP and the Abu Sayyaf. Burnham revealed this a year ago in her book *In the Presence of My Enemies*, which was based on her eyewitness accounts as a captive of the Abu Sayyaf from 2001 to 2002. She returned to the Philippines this August to testify against a number of Abu Sayyaf elements being tried in court.

The DOJ was pelted with criticism when videos and records of Burnham's testimony refuted its claims that Burnham had supposedly made a retraction.